

“A 600 Metre View”: Oral History, Historical Narrative and the Canadian Experience in  
Afghanistan

for  
History 394  
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An Essay by  
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**Abbreviations**

<b>1PPCLI</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry</b>
<b>2PPCLI</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry</b>
<b>CF</b>	<b>Canadian Forces</b>
<b>FFP</b>	<b>Force Protection Platoon</b>
<b>NSE</b>	<b>National Support Element</b>
<b>PRT</b>	<b>Provincial Reconstruction Team</b>
<b>TF 1-06</b>	<b>Task Force Orion Rotation 1 2006</b>

*“When you talk to a soldier, the soldier will tell you what the world looks like based on the 600 metres around him. You ask [Lt. Col Omer] Lavoie, he’ll tell you what the world looked like, metaphorically speaking, in the area that’s around him. And you ask me, I’ll tell you what it looks like from the bigger perspective.”-Brigadier-General David Fraser*

Personal testimony from participants in military conflicts of the past has long been pursued to aid in portraying the human face of war. However, the struggle of oral history in academic forums has always rested in its inherently (and arguably valuable) subjective nature and supposed fallibility of the subjects themselves. Therefore, oral history is often considered supplemental to more ‘factual’ or ‘reliable’ written documents. However, in the case of Canada’s most recent and longest overseas combat mission, the war in Afghanistan, oral history cannot be relegated to a supporting role. The Canadian Forces’ (CF) involvement in Afghanistan ended on March 12, 2014 and thus, at the time of writing, the mission has officially been over for ten days. Understandably, the current body of historical literature regarding this conflict is small and limited in its thematic coverage. An official history of the Canadian mission to Afghanistan has yet to be composed. However, this official history cannot be successfully compiled until the experiences of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan can be sufficiently understood. In this endeavour, the value of oral history is incontestable. Sources that historians of previous military conflicts have employed in their research, such as formerly classified government documents, are not yet accessible in this embryonic post-war period. The majority of the existing academic literature adopts a very inward-looking posture towards the war in Afghanistan, predominantly focusing on the effect that the war has had on Canadian foreign and defence policies and her

status in the eyes of the international community.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, oral history becomes the primary conduit from which the historian can begin to acquire a modicum of knowledge about what Canadian Forces experienced on the ground in Afghanistan. Oral history does not simply confirm or challenge an existing historical narrative of what members of the CF experienced in Afghanistan. Along with memoirs and accounts written by participants, such as (then) Private Ryan Flavelle and (then) Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, oral history is *creating* that narrative. In the study of the topic of the Canadian experience in Afghanistan, oral history serves not simply to *personify* the mission – oral history *presents* the conflict to those outside of the theatre of operations.

I was given the distinct privilege of conducting interviews with three of Canada's veterans of Afghanistan, one of which, fittingly, took place on the official end date of the mission. I met with Dr. Anne Irwin, a retired army Major, who was embedded with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Charlie Company (1PPCLI C Company) as an anthropology researcher, Corporal (then Private); Nick Kerr, a combat infantry soldier with 2PPCLI Bravo Company (2 PPCLI B Company); and Bombardier Stefan Conquist, a reservist who served as a gunner and dismounted soldier with the Force Protection Platoon (FPP) attached to the National Support Element (NSE). Both Dr. Irwin and Cpl. Kerr served with Task Force Orion (TF 1-06), led by (then) Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, in southern Afghanistan in 2006, whilst Bdr. Conquist served with Operation ATHENA Task Force 3-09 for a seven-month tour beginning October 2009. Each of their experiences in the theatre of operations overseas is unique and it must be recognized that three veterans do not constitute a comprehensive representation of the experiences of all CF members who served in Afghanistan. However, their individual accounts *do* contribute to, confirm, and challenge existing perceptions of the mission to

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

Afghanistan. Their testimonies demonstrate the necessity of oral history in creating a historical narrative of Canada's most recent war.

The predominant focus present in current academic writing regarding the Canadian mission in Afghanistan has been on the marked change that this mission represented for Canada's international security policy. This presents the mission in Afghanistan under the umbrella of political history. Academics such as Robert W. Murray, John McCoy, Kimberly Marten, Christopher Kirkey, and Nicholas Ostroy all present the same argument: the mission to Afghanistan resulted in Canada entering into an unprecedented counterinsurgency war, which has dramatically affected Canadian foreign and military policy."<sup>2</sup> Following an era of Cold War-style "peacekeeping", the mission in Afghanistan took on an unfamiliar method of active warfare for both political leaders and the Canadian Forces. However, the ongoing academic discussion predominantly focuses on the effects felt at the macro-levels of government, and does not increase our understanding about what the Canadian forces experienced on the ground in Afghanistan. In contrast, works such as *No Lack of Courage* by Colonel Bernd Horn and *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-insurgency Fight in Afghanistan* by Lt. Col. Hope, designed to present operational experiences during the mission, are based strongly on oral history or first-hand experience. Even the works of historians such as Sean Maloney are based primarily on empirical observation and testimony. Maloney's self-professed purpose in his writing is "to record what it was like during these times" and reflects "what appeared to be happening at the time."<sup>3</sup> The oral basis of these works indicates the vital role oral history is already playing in shaping our historical understanding of the experiences of soldiers in Afghanistan.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Sean Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011): xi.

Oral history reveals how the new military policy, emerging out of unfamiliar fighting tactics in Afghanistan, affected the platoon level of the Canadian army. Cpl. Kerr's tour from February to August 2006 with TF Orion marked a critical juncture in the mission. Canada had accepted responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kandahar City in 2005, while the operational mandate was shifting from the framework of the US-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to a NATO-led coalition. This evolution was called Operation Archer.<sup>4</sup> Task Force Orion was the premier Canadian battle group serving under Operation ARCHER.<sup>5</sup> The Manley Report, presented in 2008, found that Canada required "a better integrated and more consistent policy approach" regarding objectives for her role in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> The conclusion that there was a lack of clarity about Canada's military mandate is paralleled through oral testimony. Cpl. Kerr recalls that, as TF 1-06 was the first tour operating under the new mandate, there was not an abundance of experiential training to be passed on to B Company before they deployed and that, once in theatre, the operational tempo in the unfamiliar environment was "let's just go and do this and see what happens."<sup>7</sup> Cpl. Kerr discussed how "it wasn't until...we got over there [Afghanistan] that our senior leadership was saying 'this is new to us, we're all on a learning curve'."<sup>8</sup> The current and popular academic discourse on the mission's effect on policy is not contradicted by oral history. Rather, it reveals the extent to which those same factors affecting Canadian policy impacted individual members of the infantry. While it must be acknowledged that one perspective is not an adequate representation of the community of veterans of this mission, Cpl. Kerr's early experiences does imply that the

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<sup>4</sup> Colonel Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010): 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-insurgency Fight in Afghanistan* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008): 39.

<sup>7</sup> Corporal Nick Kerr, Interviewed by Sarah Fitterer, Victoria BC, 12 March 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Cpl. Kerr.

sense of the “unknown” was tangible at the platoon-level of the CF. Cpl. Kerr’s account is corroborated by Dr. Irwin’s experience. When asked about her pre-deployment training, she revealed that she did not receive any, much to her surprise, and that there was a general sense of naiveté about the situation she was entering.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Irwin acquired this perception from the absence of training, in addition to recognizing that, following her tour, no other researcher would be permitted to conduct that particular type of field study with so little preparation.<sup>10</sup> Here, oral history operates in its function to “[allow] the voice of ordinary people to be heard alongside...the written record.”<sup>11</sup> Both Cpl. Kerr and Dr. Irwin’s testimony represent how soldiers involved in the early stages of the Kandahar tour were affected by Canada’s new doctrine of counter-insurgency, adding a personal and tactical dimension to a politicized academic discussion.

However, oral history also presents challenges to the politically dominated discussion of evolving military policy. Murray and McCoy argue that the Canadian Forces were not adequately prepared to successfully operate under the new military policy of counterinsurgency.<sup>12</sup> While Murray and McCoy refer to the mission in its entirety and the military as a singular institution, oral history testimonies offer a grassroots-level contradiction. Cpl. Kerr and Bdr. Conquist both stated that they did not feel hampered in their ability to confidently carry out their respective roles. According to Cpl. Kerr, B Company 2 PPCLI received just four months of pre-deployment training, while 1PPCLI had received over a year of preparation. Despite Cpl. Kerr’s comparative lack of experience-based training, “not having

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Anne Irwin, Interviewed by Sarah Fitterer, Victoria BC, 5 March 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Dr. Irwin.

<sup>11</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 1999): 196.

<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Murray and John McCoy, “From Middle Power to Peacebuilder: The Use of the Canadian Forces in Modern Canadian Foreign Policy,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 171.

enough training never came across [his] mind”.<sup>13</sup> He recalls his training instinctively taking over as his company was knowingly ordered into an ambush. When asked about how he felt when his platoon came across an ANP vehicle accident with multiple crush injuries, Bdr. Conquist responded that he was “thinking about [his] drills but also thinking about what’s going to happen next and how can I make that easier.”<sup>14</sup> Bdr. Conquist also recounts how

I had some serious misgivings about [the Nanuk Remote Weapons Station] as a weapons system in certain fundamental ways, and the training was important because it helped me get around what I think were shortcomings with the system at the time. It was a very new system and we were going to be the first unit to use it ever in an operational theatre.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, Bdr. Conquist felt that the training he received was essential to his ability to effectively perform in his role, particularly as his platoon’s only gunner. Moreover, Cpl. Kerr expressed satisfaction over the weaponry employed against the Taliban. When asked how supported he felt by issued equipment, Cpl. Kerr replied that

...It wasn’t like dealing with a modern day enemy that had the same type of equipment we did, like heavy air support or heavy gunfire like what our LAVS provided or 50cal machine guns...a hundred percent, I felt good.<sup>16</sup>

Neither of these testimonies in isolation can offer much contribution to Murray and McCoy’s broader discussion about the success of the CF in Afghanistan for the duration of the mission. However, these observations are critical. They provide intimate personal accounts that make up the framework of what Canadian troops experienced on the ground in Afghanistan. While they do not expressly contradict Murray and McCoy’s argument, their testimonies indicates that, at least as far as Cpl. Kerr and Bdr. Conquist’s tours were concerned, not all participants were affected by shortcomings of the CF that may have been observed at other levels. Moreover,

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Cpl Kerr.

<sup>14</sup> Bombardier Stefan Conquist, Interviewed by Sarah Fitterer, 10 & 17 March 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Cpl. Kerr.

reflections on soldiers' responses to training and its effectiveness do not yet manifest itself outside of oral history. This chapter of the history of the experiences on the ground in Afghanistan emerges primarily from oral history.

In 2011, historians David Bercuson, J.L. Granatstein, and Nancy Pearson Mackie reflected on the outcomes of the Canada's mission to Afghanistan, and posited that, while Canadian policy was slow to respond, the Canadian Forces on the ground effectively adapted to the changing and unfamiliar nature of combat during the Afghanistan mission. They also state that virtually all of the available evidence contributing to their assertion about the performance of Canadian soldiers is anecdotal.<sup>17</sup> Bdr. Conquist draws similar conclusions whilst calling Murray and McCoy into question. They contend that Canada entered into the mission in Kandahar with little recognition of the limitations of the Canadian Forces.<sup>18</sup> Conquist acknowledged that one operational area where the CF *was* more limited was in ammunition and weaponry, particularly compared to their American counterparts. However, during his tour, Conquist observed that the Canadians developed and perfected creative tactics, such as employing smoke screens and attacking from different ranges, in order to mitigate any limitations on firepower.<sup>19</sup> Bdr. Conquist's testimony provides a convincing counter to Murray and McCoy's argument by revealing his first-hand observation of the malleability of the CF in strategic planning. Moreover, Bdr. Conquist's oral account confirms Bercuson, Granatstein, and Mackie's recent conclusion about the mission to Afghanistan – a conclusion that is founded predominantly on oral history.

The previous examples demonstrate instances whereby oral history has annotated the existing perceptions of what Canadians experienced in Afghanistan. However, in the case of the

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<sup>17</sup> David Bercuson, J.L. Granatstein, and Nancy Pearson Mackie, "Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, Oct 2011, 34 & 2.

<sup>18</sup> Murray and McCoy, "From Middle Power to Peacebuilder", 178.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Bdr. Conquist.

Canadian mission to Afghanistan, oral history is not merely supplemental; it is fundamental to the creation of a historical narrative. Oral history also sheds light on issues of CF leadership in Afghanistan. Works based strongly on oral history and personal account, such as *In Their Own Words: Canadian Stories of Valour and Bravery from Afghanistan, 2001-2007* and (then) Lt. Col. Hope's account *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-insurgency Fight in Afghanistan*, present a discussion about leadership during the mission. Both works, produced by the Canadian Defence Academy Press, represent a positive and personable view of leadership on the ground in Afghanistan. Lt. Col Hope identifies an effective leader as being "personal, hands-on, trusting...present" in times of risk and reflects on his own endeavours to embody that image.<sup>20</sup> Virtually all of the oral histories compiled in *In Their Own Words*, ranging from privates to lieutenant-colonels, repeatedly emphasizes that the most respected commanders were not those with combat experience, but those who were able to relate to their subordinates.<sup>21</sup> Cpl. Kerr provides experiential support for this doctrine of leadership. He recalls the sense of fear that accompanied him on his first patrol outside the wire in Kandahar City, and his platoon sergeant observing this and offering him reassurances.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Irwin's testimony provides further support example of this type of leadership at the platoon level. She recalls seeing a sergeant advocate on behalf of his troops to his platoon commander, insisting that the soldiers of C Company were too battle-weary to continue. When this objection was dismissed, she watched this same sergeant halt a patrol in order to encourage the soldiers of C Company. In her own words, the section commanders "were the real leaders."<sup>23</sup> Cpl. Kerr and Dr. Irwin's

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<sup>20</sup> Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman*, 21. While this work includes recorded conversations, it must be categorized as oral history's cousin, the memoir.

<sup>21</sup> Craig Leslie Mantle, et al, eds., *In Their Own Words: Canadian Stories of Valour and Bravery from Afghanistan, 2001-2007* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2013): 73, 98, 105, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Cpl Kerr.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Dr. Irwin.

testimonies' contribute to the discussion of successful leadership in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan. Moreover, this conversation has been generated primarily by oral history and personal account. In the future official history of Canada's mission to Afghanistan, oral history needs to play a vital role in the analysis of the dynamic of commanding officers and their troops.

However, oral history simultaneously reveals another perspective on leadership within the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. Dr. Irwin observed:

...there was a real sense of distrust of the higher command. They [the soldiers] were very frustrated by the ... constantly changing orders...like the one time, we prepared for a two day thing and were gone for three weeks ...it wasn't clear to us that there was any plan. It felt like we were just running over Hell's Half-acre and they [the commanders] always said 'all this stuff is intelligence driven' and that probably was the case but at the level of privates and corporals, that wasn't clear at all... I think a lot of them felt that there were very senior officers out there who just wanted to get their names in the paper, get their glory. That was a pretty common perception.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Irwin's assessment is critical to our understanding of the experiences of soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan. While the previously mentioned works advocate for a personal style of leadership, Dr. Irwin's conclusion indicates that, in the eyes of the soldiers, this practice was not necessarily visible beyond the parameters of their company. Cpl. Kerr recounts an incident whereby B Company was commanded to drive back to Forward Operating Base Wilson through a planned Taliban ambush because it was considered a "safety infraction" for them to stay at KAF, where there were no available beds.<sup>25</sup> Cpl. Kerr recalls the shared feeling of anger in response to being ordered to drive into a known attack, particularly because all requests for alternative options were denied. This incident is hardly an encompassing representation of the experience of all privates and corporals on TF 1-06, let alone the broader mission, but it does

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Dr. Irwin.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Cpl. Kerr.

provide experiential support for Dr. Irwin's conclusion. However, oral history does not only provide insight into the experience of junior-ranking Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. Oral history also reveals the equally valuable perspective of senior officers. Dr. Irwin's observation is reiterated by embedded journalist Adam Day in his exploration of Operation MEDUSA, an offensive campaign carried out by Canada and other NATO members under the leadership of Brigadier-General David Fraser (which occurred less than a month after Cpl. Kerr and Dr. Irwin left the field).<sup>26</sup> When Day expressed that platoon-level soldiers did not understand BGen. Fraser's decision to forego a planned 48-hour artillery bombardment, the latter responded that

When you talk to a soldier, the soldier will tell you what the world looks like based on the 600 metres around him. You ask [Lt. Col Omer] Lavoie, he'll tell you what the world looked like, metaphorically speaking, in the area that's around him. And you ask me, I'll tell you what it looks like from the bigger perspective...corporals and sergeants don't run brigades. Brigade commanders run brigades. And corporals and privates don't know what's happening at every hour of the day at the brigade level.<sup>27</sup>

Here, oral history contributes two distinct perspectives regarding the dissemination of information and how it affected the Canadian Forces on the ground. Dr. Irwin's observation is an insightful representation of the issue of knowledge and its effect on non-commissioned soldiers' perceptions of their senior officers. Fraser's evaluation provides an empirical portrayal of the broader scope of the military command during Canada's mission. Thus, oral history provides the historian with a more nuanced understanding about the overall perceptions of leadership during the Canadian mission. Moreover, testimony such as Cpl. Kerr's can only be discovered through oral history and that provides empirical support for broader conclusions such as Irwin's.

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<sup>26</sup> Brigadier- General David Fraser was the commander of Regional Command South brigade in southern Afghanistan from February to October 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Adam Day, *Witness to War: Reporting on Afghanistan 2004 – 2009* (Ontario: CDA and Magic Light Publishing, 2010): 125, 127. Lieutenant-Colonel Omer Lavoie was the Battle Group Commanding Officer of the 1 Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, Task Force 3-06.

Moreover, the differing perspectives conveyed through these oral testimonies insert themselves into the broader discussion of Canadian military leadership in Afghanistan that has been developed primarily through oral history. It is evident that there are a multitude of perspectives on the topic of perceptions of leadership; further historical study should be conducted within the framework constructed through oral history.

As has been expressed, oral history is the primary source available to historians to understand the individual experiences of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, along with written personal accounts. However, it is not merely a source of convenience. It provides the most authentic information about the social dynamics of soldiers on the ground. Private Ryan Flavelle wrote *The Patrol: Seven Days in the Life of a Canadian Soldier in Afghanistan*, which is a personal account of a patrol he went on in 2008, when he on deployment. While there are other works based more predominantly on oral history, the author has selected *The Patrol* as a comparative piece of experiential testimony for two reasons. Firstly, it recounts the experiences of a private on what shall be called, for lack of a better term, a *typical* patrol.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, both Cpl. Kerr and Bdr. Conquist recommended this account to the author as a reliably authentic parallel to their own experiences in Afghanistan. It must once again be acknowledged that Flavelle's account is a singular perspective; however, this account, and Cpl. Kerr's and Bdr. Conquist's endorsement, confirms Bercuson, Granatstein, and Mackie's argument that virtually all knowledge of the performance of Canadians in Afghanistan is based on personal testimony.

One particular discussion that emerges out of these personal accounts regards the relationship between members of the Regular Force and Reserve Force. Flavelle served as "a

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<sup>28</sup> Unlike works such as *In Their Own Words*, whereby the oral histories recount exceptional incidents in the theatre of operations, with each subject receiving official commendations.

reservist, a part-time soldier” attached to 2 PPCLI B Company in 2008 as a radio signaler.<sup>29</sup> A predominant theme throughout the course of work is his sense that he was never fully integrated and accepted by the infantry he served alongside. Dr. Irwin’s observations about the relationship between reservists and regular forces were quite different. When asked about segregation between different branches of the forces on the ground, she recalls that she never noticed a difference between reservist and regular forces. She remembers, “there were times where I didn’t even know guys were reserve until we went to Cyprus and they were wearing their berets.”<sup>30</sup> While Dr. Irwin here refers to infantry soldiers, she also recalls that there was a high level of respect for people like radio signalers; they had a unique skill set and shared in the risks of the infantry.<sup>31</sup> Flavelle’s experience does not reflect Dr. Irwin’s view, as he recalls being referred to as “just some fucking sig op” by a platoon sergeant.<sup>32</sup> Bdr. Conquist, a member of the Reserve Force, recalls his relationship with members of the Regular Force in his platoon. He reflects that there was an initial sense of distance, with the *modus operandi* being “You do your job and stay out of their way, they’ll tell you what to do and stay out of your way,” but that the treatment improved, particularly after he helped one Regular Force platoon leader with a computer.<sup>33</sup> All three accounts offer insight into this particular element of social ties that is not found in contemporary historical discourse. How can inter- and intra- rank relationships be understood apart from the testimonies of the participants themselves? Again, oral history is found to be influential in creating a historical narrative about the minutiae of what the soldiers experienced on the ground. Dr. Irwin and Bdr. Conquist offer different reflections on Flavelle’s personal

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<sup>29</sup> Ryan Flavelle, *The Patrol: Seven Days in the Life of a Canadian Soldier in Afghanistan* (Toronto: Harper Collins e-book, 2011). The Kindle format of this electronic book did not include page numbers.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Dr. Irwin.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Flavelle *The Patrol*.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Bdr. Conquist

experience; here, oral history demonstrates that the experience of Canadians is not collective. Memoirs have been, and will continue to be, essential in initiating this discussion of social bonds during the military mission and oral history will serve to elicit further corroborating or contrasting accounts.

As BGen. Fraser discussed, the perspectives of what happened in Afghanistan will be contingent on rank and circumstance. A soldier's "600 metre view" will not be sufficient to explain causal linkages between operations based on intelligence that has not been declassified. Likewise, a brigadier-general cannot provide an adequate representation of the experiences of combat infantry soldiers in Afghanistan. Oral history presents an individualized perspective of the reality of the Canadian mission to Afghanistan. Moreover, as Bercuson, Granatstein, and Mackie note, time will reveal a plethora of sources and information that will greatly contribute to the historical narrative, such as after action reports and message logs.<sup>34</sup> However, the post-war period of the mission to Afghanistan is weeks old. These sources are simply not yet accessible. The preponderance of academic writing is focused on the broader evolution of Canadian policy in light of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. Therefore, oral history has emerged as perhaps the most important source for contemporary historians to employ in order to begin to construct the framework of a historical narrative about what was experienced by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. This most recent mission is Canada's longest, and thus is a critical part of Canadian military history. Oral history has already served to contribute to the broader political discussion by providing grassroots annotation. Specific oral testimony of military experience, such as the effectiveness of training, at times challenges existing perceptions, such as the unpreparedness of the Canadian forces for this mission. Moreover, topics of discourse that do not yet appear in

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<sup>34</sup> Bercuson, Granatstein, and Pearson Mackie, "Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan", 2.

current academic historical writing, including perceptions of leadership on the ground, are elements of the historical narrative that have emerged through oral history. The examination of the social dynamics of the Canadian forces in Afghanistan is another aspect contributed to the narrative by oral history. It must be expressed that this paper has, to borrow a colloquial phrase, ‘only scratched the surface’ of the value of oral history in understanding this newest chapter of Canada’s military history. Alternative sources are severely lacking. Therefore, until such a time that these other sources emerge, oral history will continue to be foundational in shaping our knowledge about the experience of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

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Appendix A

For preliminary literature dealing with Canadian policy and the influence of the mission to Afghanistan, please see:

Jockel, Joseph T. and Sokolsky, Joel J. "Canada and the War in Afghanistan: NATO's Odd Man Out Steps Forward." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 2008): 100-115, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/citedby/10.1080/14794010801917212>.

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Marten, Kimberly. "From Kabul to Kandahar: The Canadian Forces and Change." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 214-236, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/full/10.1080/02722011003734720>